

LIGN 130 - Semantics

Spring 2011

This course is an introduction to semantics, that part of linguistics that studies how human languages convey meaning. The course address issues like the nature of meaning, the basic data that semantics aims to account for (ambiguity, synonymy, contradiction, entailment), some simple formal tools that semantics makes use (sets and related notions), aspects of the interaction between syntax and semantics (scope and the meaning of various syntactic categories), and issues like implicatures and presuppositions, that are usually taken to be part of pragmatics (the subfield of linguistics that studies how meaning depends).

Lectures

Tuesday and Thursday 9:30-10:50 am, CENTR 216

Sections (final schedule)

Section 1: Tuesday 11-11:50 am, [room TBA](#)

Section 2: Tuesday 1-1:50 pm, AP&M 4301

Instructor

IVANO CAPONIGRO

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Teaching Assistant

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Office hours: Monday 3-4 pm, AP&M 3331A

Prerequisites

- LIGN 101 or instructor's permission

About the course (IMPORTANT!)

- [This course has no textbook and few required readings.](#)
- [All the slides that are shown in class are posted right after class.](#)

- Some lecture notes may be posted from time to time.
- Everything that you are expected to learn and know is presented and discussed in class or is contained in the few required readings.
- Therefore, attending the class and participating to the class discussion is REALLY important.
- **Remember that the instructor's slides and lecture notes ARE NOT meant to replace attendance or your own notes.**
- This webpage is updated often, also based on the discussion in class. Please make sure to **bookmark this webpage and check the schedule below frequently.**

Evaluation

- 7 Homework assignments: 36% (the lowest grade will be dropped)
- 1 Mid-term exam: 24%
- 1 Final exam: 40%

Exams

- The mid-term exam covers the material that has been introduced up to that point, while the final exam covers all the material. They are both in class exams.
- If serious documented reasons prevent you from being able to take either exam, talk to the instructor ASAP but not later than Friday April 8.

Homework

- Assignments can be downloaded by clicking on the links in the schedule below. They are posted on Fridays (at the latest) and are due the following Thursday (with one exception; check the schedule below).
- Assignments have to be turned in at the beginning of the class (not at the end!) according to the schedule below. Late submissions won't be accepted, unless you have serious documented reasons and have discussed them with the instructor before the homework deadline.
- You may brainstorm with your classmates, but everyone has to write up their homework assignments individually. Assignments that are unduly similar will be grounds for scrutiny and academic dishonesty charges. Also keep in mind that if you rely on others for the assignments, you are not likely to do well on the exams.
- Graded assignments and the mid-term exam will be returned in class, or they can be picked up in section.
- No make-up assignments will be given.
- Each student's lowest assignment grade will be dropped in calculating their final grade.

WebCT

- Your homework and test grades are written on the homework or test and are also **posted on WebCT**.
- Compare the grades on WebCT with what you have received on paper regularly. Come and talk to the instructor ASAP if there's any discrepancy.
- WebCT won't be used for anything else. Everything else that is relevant for the class will be posted on this webpage.

Sections

- The weekly sections are not obligatory, but highly recommended, if you want to go over exercises and problems, discuss homework assignments, ask clarification questions that you did not manage to ask in lecture, and review and discuss the material covered in lecture or the required material that we were not able to discuss in class.

Password protected material

- Most of the downloadable material that is posted in the schedule below is password-protected.
- Each student who is enrolled in the class should have received the ID and the password that are required to download the password-protected material by e-mail to their official UCSD e-mail address. Please send the instructor an e-mail if you have any problem.
- **DOWNLOAD WARNING!** If you try to download the password protected material from your personal computer with a browser that have the UCSD proxy on, you may get a failure message before even entering your ID and password. Two solutions: (1) use a different browser without a UCSD proxy (for instance, if you usually use Firefox, try to download by using Internet Explorer), or (2) turn off the UCSD proxy on your usual browser so that you can enter your own password for the class website, since apparently the proxy does it automatically.

SCHEDULE

Last update: 04/07/2011

The schedule below is **tentative** and will be **updated** through out the course. Check it regularly!

WEEKS & DAYS		Class Topics	Homework, required readings, and other material (required material in bold) (a * means that ID and password are needed)
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wk 1	3/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of the class • What is meaning? • What is semantics? • What facts does semantics aim to account for? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture notes • de Swart (pp. 1-14)*: (1) the meaning of "meaning"; (2) meaning, mind, and world; (3) the interaction of semantics with syntax and pragmatics • Portner (pp. 3-12)*: what meaning is and what it is not • Larson & Segal (pp. 1-15 and 20-24)*: (1) the facts that semantics aims to account for; (2) compositionality and recursion; (3) use of semantics rules; (4) the role of semantics within linguistics and cognitive sciences
	3/31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning of a sentence: truth-conditions • Entailment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture notes • Portner (pp. 12-25)*: the meaning of a sentence • <u>OPTIONAL: more on entailment</u> • <u>OPTIONAL: Pinocchio's paradox</u> • <u>OPTIONAL: Jean Aitchison, <i>Words in the Mind. An Introduction to the Mental Lexicon</i>, 3rd edition, Blackwell, Oxford, UK, 2003.</u> [If you want to know more about the meaning of words and related theories and psycholinguistic experiments]
wk 2	4/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sets and some simple related notions • Possible worlds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture notes

	4/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new definition of synonymy, tautology, and contradiction • The meaning of negation (NOT) and conjunction (AND) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture notes • Lecture notes • Homework 1 is due
wk 3	4/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning of disjunction (OR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OPTIONAL: two "or" or just one? Exclusive "or" vs. inclusive "or": three recent posts from the <i>Language Log</i>: [1][2][3]
	4/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syntactic structure, word meaning, and semantic rules: Building the meaning of a simple sentence step by step 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework 2 is due [rtf]: to write in and print out [pdf]: to print out and write on
wk 4	4/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning of N, <i>the</i> and the NP <i>the+N</i> • Further meaning distinctions about nouns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - countable vs mass - collective vs atomic 	
	4/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning of adjectives • Further meaning distinctions about adjectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - intersective vs non-intersective - attributive vs predicative - gradable vs non-gradable 	<p>OPTIONAL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Sapir on gradable adjectives*</u> [feel free to read it and agree or disagree with some of the author's data and arguments] • <u>Kennedy, Adjectives*</u> [There are some technicalities; but the distinctions among adjectives and the tests used to highlight them should be clear without the technical details]
wk 5	4/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning of quantificational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework 3 is due

		<p>NPs vs referential NPs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and midterm preparation 	<p>OPTIONAL: Meaning differences across languages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Löbner, Meaning differences across languages* • Pullum, Eskimo vocabulary* • CARTOON: The future of the Eskimo vocabulary hoax (from the LanguageLog)
	4/28	MIDTERM EXAM	
wk 6	5/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polarity items and downward/upward entailment (I) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wikipedia: Polarity Items (useful short reference) <p>OPTIONAL READINGS (if you are really curious and want to know much more):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of polarity items and various proposals to account for their distribution • A more extended overview with data from a variety of languages and a semantically oriented proposal • A pragmatically oriented proposal
	5/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polarity items and downward/upward entailment (II) • Lexical vs. syntactic vs. semantic ambiguity (review) 	
wk 7	5/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage level and individual level predicates 	

	5/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tense and counterfactuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework 4 is due
wk 8	5/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary so far • Overview of pragmatics and pragmatic issues (discourse registers, deictics, speech acts) 	
	5/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From semantics to pragmatics: Tests to distinguish entailments from implicatures and presuppositions • Presuppositions and implicatures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework 5 is due • Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet (pp. 17-33): entailments, presuppositions, and implicatures: definitions and tests
wk 9	5/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More on implicatures: Grice's maxims and scalar implicatures 	
	5/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Kate Davidson's</u> guest lecture: An experiment on scalar implicatures in English and ASL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework 6 is due
wk 10	5/31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semantics, pragmatics, and intonation: focus 	
	6/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrap up, questions and review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework 7 is due
finals week	6/07 TUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FINAL EXAM time 8-10 am, TBA 	

(last update: 04/07/2011)